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ABSTRACT

In an effort to determine the necessary components of an effective higher education administration program, an exploratory study was conducted of practicing senior-level academic administrators regarding their perceptions of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for effective community college academic administration. An open-ended survey was distributed to a random sample of 160 two-year academic vice presidents or deans, receiving responses from 47% (n=76) and resulting in 308 codeable responses. Thirty-eight percent (n=23) of the respondents were female; 61% (n=37) had a doctorate degree; and 49% of those doctorate degrees were in higher education. Results indicated that the knowledge and skill area most frequently considered necessary was the need for contextual competence, or the understanding of the environment in which higher education administration is practiced. This area received 175 responses. Further, competence in communication received 105 responses, interpersonal competence 108 responses, and technical competence 105. The results of the study shed little light on necessary attitudes, other than one of openness and receptivity to change. Based on study findings, higher education doctoral programs should offer courses in budget and finance, college teaching, curriculum, computers and instructional technology, and group dynamics. A list of the competencies and attitudes included in the survey instrument is appended. (TGI)

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The Ideal Community College Academic Affairs Administrator: An Inside View

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The Ideal Community College Academic Affairs Administrator: An Inside View

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There are over 90 higher education doctoral programs whose primary purpose is to prepare college and university administrators (Fife and Goodchild, 1991). These programs seem particularly popular among community college faculty and administrators. A national study of college and university administrators found that many of the 1,500 two-year college administration had higher education degrees: over 40% of the presidents, almost 40% of the chief student affairs officers, and almost 35% of the chief academic officers (Moore, Martorana, and Twombly, 1985). Another national study found that among the two-year college senior administrators in the study, 38% of the respondents had a higher education degree (Townsend and Wiese, 1990).

For these programs to maintain their credibility, they need to provide a curriculum that is appropriate for preparing higher education administrators to function effectively. One step in ensuring that higher education doctoral programs provide such a curriculum is a needs assessment on a national level. Asking practicing academic administrators what they consider to be the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes for effective academic administration can provide a sense of "baseline subject content" for higher education administration programs (Haynes 1991, p. 5). To that end, this descriptive, exploratory study surveyed a national sample of practicing senior-level academic administrators for their perceptions of what knowledge, skills, and attitudes are necessary for effective community college academic administrators, both now and in the future.

Methods

Population and sample: This study is part of a larger study whose population was vice presidents/deans of academic affairs in the more than 2,700 non-profit colleges and universities listed in the Carnegie Foundation's A Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (1987). Four hundred institutions, including 160 two-year schools, were randomly selected after stratifying by institutional type to ensure a representative sample from each institutional type. Then the name and address of the vice president or dean of academic affairs for each selected institution was located in the 1993 Peterson's Guide to Colleges and Universities.

Instrument: To find out what practitioners really needed to know, we thought it best to use an open-ended survey. Our belief was that a close-ended survey with forced choices would not yield the same kind of information we would get through an open-ended response. Rather, a close-ended instrument would reflect the

researchers' view of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes practitioners should have, and practitioners would be forced to choose from among the researcher-dictated choices.

Therefore, in Fall 1993 we sent a researcher-designed two-page, open-ended survey in which respondents were asked to answer several questions, including the following: (1) What knowledge, skills, and attitudes do you think are currently needed by people entering academic affairs administration? and (2) What knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes do you think will become necessary for academic affairs administrators in the next five to ten years? Respondents were also asked to specify their sex and highest degree held.

Respondents' comments about desirable knowledge, skills, and attitudes were tabulated by the respondent's sex and highest degree in conjunction with institutional type. The six combinations of sex and highest degree were 1) female with doctorate not in higher education; 2) female with doctorate in higher education; 3) female with no doctorate; 4) male with doctorate not in higher education; 5) male with doctorate in higher education; and 6) male with no doctorate.

Coding of data: We initially thought that the responses could be coded in terms of the standard courses taught in higher education doctoral programs, e.g., history of higher education, organization and governance, curriculum. As we looked at the responses, we decided that they were too broad and wide ranging for this approach to be effective. We turned to a similar study to see how its data had been analyzed. Beatty and Stamatakos (1990) surveyed all full-time faculty in student affairs administration programs and a national sample of student affairs administrators about the knowledge, skills, and competences that should be taught in student affairs doctoral programs. Unfortunately, the researchers' description of their study does not make clear how the results to their open-ended survey were coded.

Finally we decided that an approach that took advantage of the distinction among knowledge, skills, and attitudes might be more appropriate. So we chose to code the responses according to Stark, Lowther, and Haggerty's (1986) outcomes of professional education, a typology with which the senior researcher was familiar because of previous work (Townsend, 1989).

Using a grounded theory approach, Stark, Lowther, and Hagerty examined the literature on initial professional preparation for 12 professional fields, including education. They also surveyed over 2,000 faculty in 10 of these fields to determine what outcomes are addressed in professional programs. The result of their research was a set of 11 professional preparation outcomes, including six professional competences and five professional attitudes.

In this study, the researchers used the six professional competences found in the Stark et al work (adaptive, conceptual, contextual, integrative, interpersonal, and technical competences) and added a seventh competence: communications. Table 1 lists the competences and attitudes used in this study, describes each one briefly, and gives examples. After all the responses about

knowledge, skills, and attitudes were entered on a spreadsheet, the responses were then categorized in terms of these outcomes.

As with all coding systems, the researcher makes a judgement as to where a particular response fits. Some judgements were clearcut. For example, quite a few respondents cited the need for writing or speaking skills. These skills clearly fit under the communication competence. The meaning of other responses was harder to interpret and thus difficult, sometimes even impossible, to codify. For example, when asked about skills needed for current and future administrators, some respondents wrote "organizational." Did they mean the administrator should be well organized? Did they mean the administrator should have the skill to maneuver effectively within the organization? We decided to list as "uncodeable" all responses whose meaning was not readily apparent or depended upon interpretation. There was a total of 624 codeable responses: 265 about desirable knowledge, 242 about desirable skills, and 197 about desirable attitudes.

Results

Sample

Of the 160 two-year academic vice-presidents/deans to whom the survey was sent, 108 (67%) were men and 52 (33%) women. Seventy-six (47%) of the questionnaires were returned, with 61 (38% of the total questionnaires) completed. Thirty-eight (62%) of those who completed the questionnaire were male and 23 (38%) were female. Thirty-seven (61%) of the respondents had either a Ph.D. or an Ed.D. The commonness of the higher education doctorate among community college administrators is demonstrated by the fact that of those with a doctorate, almost half (49%) had theirs in higher education.

As regards the six combinations of sex and highest degree held, the numbers were as follows: For women, 6 had a doctorate but not in higher education, 7 had a doctorate in higher education, and 10 did not have a doctorate. Of the men, 13 had a doctorate but not in higher education, 11 had a doctorate in higher education, and 14 lacked a doctorate. Thus there were 19 people (13 men, 6 women) whose doctorate was not in higher education; 18 people (11 men, 7 women) with a higher education doctorate, and 24 people (14 men, 10 women) without a doctorate.

Knowledge and Skills

Respondents were asked to state what knowledge, skills, and attitudes people currently entering academic affairs administration should possess, and what knowledge, skills, and attitudes would become necessary for academic affairs administrators in the next five to ten years. Their responses did not always make a clear distinction among knowledge, skills, and attitudes. For example, some respondents indicated the same answers should be used for skills as for knowledge. Occasionally some of the responses listed

under knowledge seemed to reflect a need for a specific skill. To a lesser extent an occasional response about needed attitudes reflected a skill or some knowledge rather than an attitude. Given many respondents' intermingling of knowledge and skills, the researchers decided to report the findings about knowledge and skills collectively rather than differentiate between them. Attitudes will be reported separately, but responses that indicated skills or knowledge were classified as "uncodeable."

Current administrators should have: The bulk of the 308 codeable responses about the knowledge and skills necessary for current academic administrators fit into four of the seven professional competences used in this study: contextual, communication, interpersonal, and technical competence. Only eight responses reflected conceptual competence, and one indicated adaptive competence. No responses were coded as reflecting integrative competence.

In examining the 65 responses categorized under **communications competence**, we saw clearly the effect of computer technology. Almost half the responses indicated a need for expertise in the newest medium for communicating one's thoughts--the computer. The need for competence in the traditional communication skills of listening, speaking, and writing was also expressed in over a third of the responses. The remaining responses indicated a need simply for competence in the generic skills of "communication" or for knowledge of a foreign language (1 response).

The eight responses indicating **conceptual competence** primarily reflected the need for broad-based knowledge of the liberal arts and/or knowledge of one discipline in depth (6) or the need for a theoretical knowledge of higher education (2).

In the almost 90 responses coded as reflecting **contextual competence**, several areas of need dominated. One need was for an understanding of the legal issues and state and federal rules surrounding higher education (14). Another major need for was for knowledge and skills related to teaching and learning (13), and the associated area of curriculum (15). A few responses indicated the need for knowledge of cultural diversity (6).

The need for **interpersonal competence** was indicated in 70 responses. Most frequently, it was expressed simply as a need for skills in human relations (19 responses). More specifically, people expressed a need for knowledge of and skill in participatory management, management, or supervision (13); team building and facilitation of group interactions (10); and conflict resolution, mediation, and negotiation (8).

Of the 75 responses coded as reflecting **technical competence**, almost 30 reflected a need for competency in budgeting and financial issues. The next two most frequently expressed needs were for expertise in evaluation of people or programs (9) and for analytical or quantitative skills (10). Miscellaneous responses indicated a need for knowledge of such things as managing time (5), scheduling classes (3), and dealing with union contracts (3).

Will become necessary: As with the responses about the needs of current administrators, almost all of the 199 responses

specifying knowledge and skills necessary for academic affairs administrators in the next five to ten years fit into four comptences: contextual, communication, interpersonal, and technical competence.

Thirty-five responses were categorized under the **communications competence**. As with the responses about current administrators, the effect of technology is clearly indicated. Computer-related skills were indicated by almost 75% of the responses. Most of the other responses indicated a need for the traditional communication skills of speaking, writing, and listening.

Eighty-six items reflected a need for **contextual competence**. Unlike the responses about the needs of current administrators, responses here indicated a need for some knowledge at the macro level: national trends and issues (2); national demographics (4); and issues and trends in national higher and lower education (4) or in international education (5). The effect of technology on higher education, especially distance learning, was apparent in over 30 of the responses which indicated a need for knowledge and skills in instructional technology. Knowledge of cultural diversity and skill in working with culturally diverse people was indicated in 12 responses.

Thirty-eight items reflected **interpersonal competence**. Sometimes the need was expressed generically, i.e., seven people indicated a need for interpersonal skills. Specific interpersonal skills that were indicated included the need for ability in team building including the need for knowledge of TQM or CPI (13) and conflict resolution or mediation (7).

Of the 30 replies reflecting **technical competence**, the need for knowledge and skill in handling of budgets and finances was the most frequently indicated (12), followed by evaluation or testing and assessment (6), and planning (4).

The ability to adjust to change, categorized as the need for **adaptive competence**, was indicated by six individuals. Four knowledge responses and no skills responses were categorized as reflecting the need for **conceptual competence**. Respondents (all male) indicated a need for a broad background in the liberal arts and/or the knowledge of one discipline in depth. No responses indicated a need for **integrative competence**.

Attitudes

Very few of the 197 attitudes listed by respondents fit within the five professional attitudes identified by Stark, Lowther, and Hagerty as being taught in professional preparation programs. Only one of the five attitudes, **motivation for continued learning**, seemed to be clearly indicated; however, it was only indicated in one response about desirable attitudes in current administrators and in four responses about necessary attitudes for future administrators. Several responses also indicated a concern for ethical behavior, a concern which could be loosely interpreted as reflecting the attitude of **ethical standards**, defined by Stark,

Lowther, and Hagerty as internalization of a profession's ethics.

Interestingly, the need for **adaptive competence**, or the ability to adapt to change, clearly emerged for both current and future administrators. At least 30 of the 115 codeable responses about desirable attitudes in current administrators and 15 of the 82 responses about attitudes necessary for future administrators reflected the need for academic administrators to be open to change. Male administrators were more likely to indicate the need for adaptive competence than were female administrators.

As we examined the responses further, it became apparent that many of them seemed outer-directed and many were inner-directed. The responses we labelled outer-directed specified attitudes that included others in the attitude and suggested coping with others. For example, we believe the following attitudes deemed necessary for current administrators are externally oriented or outer-directed and focus on relations with others: understanding of others' faults (2), how to depend on others (1), caring about/valuing of students or colleagues (6), ability to deal with diversity (2), emphasis on group problem solving (2), collaborative (4), willingness to listen (1), collegiality (2), acceptance of people different from yourself (3), ability to maintain confidences (1), and tolerance of interruptions (1).

Some of the attitudes listed as necessary for future administrators provide an illustration of ones we consider as inner-directed or reflecting one's self-concept: inner security or personal well being (2), optimism (3), good control of ego (3), how to let something go and move on (1), know what you can and cannot change (1), acceptance of limitations (1), hope (1), and optimism (1).

The attitudes indicated as necessary for current and future administrators often seemed very idiosyncratic to the respondent. Only a few attitudes were listed by more than a couple of people. For example, openness/openmindedness was listed by 12 respondents (9 for current and 3 for future administrators), patience by 10 (six for current and four for future administrators), and flexibility by 11 (eight for current and three for future administrators).

Discussion

Knowledge and skills: When the responses about the knowledge and skills considered necessary for current and future academic administrators are viewed collectively, certain patterns emerge.

The need for **contextual competence**, or the understanding of the environment in which higher education administration is practiced, was the most frequently expressed need (175 responses or 34%). Although respondents indicated that current administrators needed to be aware of legal issues and government rules affecting higher education, this need was rarely indicated as necessary for future administrators. Respondents believed that future administrators were more apt to need an understanding of cultural diversity and instructional technology than did current administrators. For both questions, the prevalence of responses

indicating a need for knowledge and skills about teaching and learning and about the curriculum reflects academic administrators' oversight of these concerns.

Three competences had almost the same number of responses indicated: communication (100 or 20%), interpersonal (108 or 21%), and technical (105 or 21%). The need for computer literacy dominated responses categorized as reflecting competence in **communication**, with almost 55% of the responses indicating this need. For **interpersonal** competence, the importance of expertise in team building and conflict resolution was the dominant need for both current and future administrators. The greatest **technical** need was for knowledge and/or skills in budgeting and finance. This need was expressed in 40% of the responses. The next most frequently indicated technical need was for knowledge and skills in evaluation of people and programs.

Little need for **conceptual competence**, defined either as understanding the theoretical foundations of higher education or having a foundational or in-depth knowledge of a specific discipline or of the liberal arts, was indicated. Of the responses indicating need, 10 were from men and only two from women.

Attitudes: The results of this study shed little light as to what attitudes academic administrators need to have, other than an openness and receptivity to change. Some attitudes focused on self-concept; others focused on relations with others in the institution. Patience, flexibility, and openness or openmindedness also emerged as important attitudes to a number of respondents.

The Stark, Lowther, and Hagerty typology of professional attitudes worked poorly for coding the attitudes expressed in this study. One reason for the poor fit may be that Stark, Lowther, and Hagerty's attitudes reflect ones found in programs preparing individuals for professions. Not everyone regards higher education administration as a profession. Also academic administrators are more apt to come from the faculty than are administrators in student affairs or institutional administration. Thus academic administrators often consider themselves faculty first and always and administrators temporarily. This mindset may also work against their considering themselves as practicing the profession of academic administration.

The typology of attitudes may also be inappropriate for practicing administrators as opposed to those who are preparing to be administrators. For example, the attitude of career marketability, or the development while in a professional program of one's marketability upon graduation from a program, is not relevant for those who are already employed.

Implications for Research and Practice

Research: A replication of this study with deans/vice-presidents of student affairs and of administration would provide further information about what competences and attitudes are necessary for senior-level community college administrators, regardless of their primary area of oversight within the

institution.

However, a problem with replicating this study may lie with the typology used to code the responses. At least as evidenced in this study, Stark, Lowther, and Haggerty's typology of outcomes for professional programs seems to have limitations. First of all, this study's researchers believed it necessary to modify the original typology by breaking Stark, Lowther, and Hagerty's interpersonal communication competence into two: interpersonal competence and communication competence. Next, the need for one of the competences, integrative, was not indicated at all in the responses, and the need for two other competences, adaptive and conceptual, was rarely evidenced. Finally, as indicated above, the attitudes taught in professional preparation programs do not seem to be the ones expressed by practicing academic administrators as necessary for current and future administrators. More research needs to be conducted to determine what attitudes do seem to be necessary for effective academic administrators.

Practice: The study's findings have implications for providers of professional education for current and future academic administrators. At least four needs for academic administrators clearly emerge from this study: (1) ability to handle budgets and financial matters, (2) knowledge of curriculum and instructional practices and technology, (3) expertise in use of computers, and (4) receptivity to change. The message for higher education doctoral programs seems clear: offer (and probably require) courses in budget and finance, college teaching, and curriculum. Also, faculty and students in higher education programs must become proficient in the use of computers and instructional technology. Higher education programs have already been faulted in a recent national study for "failing to prepare college administrators to manage campus technology" (Chronicle of Higher Education, November 1995, A23). Higher education faculty's willingness to change their own teaching and incorporate instructional technology into their classrooms may then serve as a model for receptivity to change.

Competence in interpersonal relations may also need to be addressed in higher education doctoral programs. A course in group dynamics could facilitate the ability to build teams and perhaps to resolve conflicts, two needs frequently expressed in this study. At the very least, such a course could be suggested as an elective.

Finally, the findings also have implications for current and future academic affairs administrators. Current administrators can gain a better understanding of what knowledge, skills, and attitudes to seek in candidates for positions in academic administration, e.g., fiscal expertise, knowledge of instructional technology. These same candidates can better understand what knowledge, skills, and attitudes they should develop as part of their efforts to strengthen their candidacy and to project to the seasoned administrators who will interview them.

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Table 1

Professional Competences

Adaptive Competence: The ability to adapt to change

Communication competence: The ability to communicate well orally and in writing. Is expressed in the need for skills in

* listening
* speaking
* writing
* use of computer

Conceptual competence: The understanding of

* the theoretical foundations of higher education, i.e., the cultural, economic, historical, and philosophical foundations of education and higher education

* an academic discipline at a doctoral level

* subject area content of various fields, including the liberal arts

Contextual competence: The understanding of the current environment in which higher education administration is practiced. Indicated in the desire for knowledge of special sectors of higher education such as

* community colleges
* continuing and adult education
* developmental education
* international education
* vocational education

or of specific areas or topics within higher education such as

* accreditation
* cultural diversity
* curriculum
* enrollment
* faculty
* functions of non-academic departments
* instructional technology
* legal issues
* organization and governance
* roles of deans, department chairs, etc.
* state and federal regulations
* students
* student affairs
* teaching

or of knowledge specific to a particular institution and peer institutions

* institutional history
* institutional norms
* institutional politics

Integrative competence: The ability to meld theory and technical skills in actual practice

Interpersonal competence: The ability to deal effectively with people in order to accomplish one's work. Includes the need for knowledge of

* consensus building
* group facilitation skills
* leadership
* management
* mentoring
* negotiation, including with unions
* personnel matters, e.g., interviewing, hiring, firing
* supervision
* team development, e.g., TQM, CQI

Technical competence: The ability to perform tasks or functions required of administrators in higher education institutions:

* budgeting and finance
* class scheduling
* curriculum development and revision
* enrollment management
* evaluation of faculty and programs
* fund raising
* grant writing
* student recruitment, advising, and retention

Also includes generic administrative skills such as

* analytical/thinking skills
* decision making
* goal setting
* information finding
* policy making
* problem solving
* strategic planning
* stress management
* time management

Professional Attitudes

Career marketability: marketability of graduates due to training and their own attitude and awareness about what needs to be done to be marketable

Professional identity: internalization of a profession's norms, competencies, and values into an understanding of professional role

Ethical standards: internalization of a profession's ethics

Scholarly concern for improvement: recognition of need to increase knowledge in the profession through use and conduct of research appropriate to administrative role

Motivation for continued learning: desire to continue to renew and upgrade knowledge and skills

Adapted from Stark, Lowther, and Hagerty's Table of Professional Preparation Outcomes in Responsive Professional Education (1986).